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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by International Movement ATD Fourth World, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.5/2011/1.

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Statement*

Background

1. Less than five years remain for the international community to make good the promises made in the United Nations Millennium Declaration to, "Spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty" (General Assembly resolution 55/2, para. 11). As recognized in the outcome document of the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals in September 2010, although progress has been made in reaching the Goals, success has not been equally distributed neither between nor within countries (see General Assembly resolution 65/1). A greater understanding is needed of how measures to eradicate extreme poverty, and achieve the Goals, can universally benefit people living in poverty, prioritizing those living in the most vulnerable conditions.

Need for a rights-based approach to eradicate extreme poverty founded on the knowledge of people with first-hand experience

2. ATD Fourth World maintains that extreme poverty is both the cause and the consequence of human rights violations.[1] A rights-based approach must therefore be central to efforts to eradicate extreme poverty, and consequently to achieve the Goals by 2015.

3. This is given credence by the General Assembly's reaffirmation that the existence of widespread extreme poverty inhibits the full and effective enjoyment of human rights. The General Assembly also reaffirms that the full and effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing and contribute to the eradication of extreme poverty.

4. Drawing on experience derived from a long-term grass-roots presence and action alongside some of the most disadvantaged families across the world, ATD Fourth World believes that a human-rights-based approach to poverty eradication can only be effective if the experience and thinking of those living in extreme poverty is utilized. Even when rights are guaranteed on paper, their enjoyment remains unfulfilled unless positive measures are taken based on the experience of people living in extreme poverty.

5. Special attention must be given to people living in extreme poverty in order for them to claim their rights. A child's right to primary education is dependent on the fulfilment of a plethora of other rights because they are inherently interdependent and interrelated. A mother living in a marginal community of Guatemala City stated that sometimes they had to choose between paying for school exams, a photocopy or some other school requirements instead of the daily tortillas.

* Issued without formal editing.

[1] This affirmation was pronounced publicly at the inaugural World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty, marked annually each 17 October since 1987 and recognized by the United Nations in 1992 as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. The International Day's mobilizing call states: "Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated. To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty" (Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World).

6. Children in extreme poverty may not attend primary school for a number of interrelated reasons: malnutrition and general health problems, lack of adequate housing and presentable clothing, school fees, parents' unemployment and the need to work to contribute to the family's income.

7. Respect and protection of human rights is not always sufficient for people living in extreme poverty to claim their rights. Due attention must also be given to discrimination on the basis of social background, which renders efforts to overcome extreme poverty fruitless as it prevents people from claiming their full set of rights and consequently reassuming their responsibilities as family members and citizens in society. A woman from a deprived neighbourhood in Cusco, Peru, stated that sometimes a marginalized person went to sell goods at the market. There were many people who had a lot of money and good positions, but the poor are thrown out and not even allowed to sell anything.

Proposals for ways forward from ATD Fourth World to work towards eradicating extreme poverty

8. There is a clear need to provide evidence-based proposals that illustrate how efforts to eradicate extreme poverty, and achieve the MDGs, can universally benefit people living in poverty, prioritizing those living in the most vulnerable conditions. Such proposals can only be effective if they capitalize on the knowledge accrued by people living in extreme poverty themselves and if they are given the means to actively participate in the elaboration of such proposals.

- **Move towards implementing a rights-based approach to eradicate extreme poverty:** We encourage States to support the draft guiding principles on human rights and extreme poverty (see A/HRC/15/41), which are based on existing human rights standards and provide an action-oriented resource for the eradication of extreme poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. These draft guiding principles are the result of consultations by a range of relevant stakeholders, including those carried out by ATD Fourth World with people living in extreme poverty in France, Peru, Poland, Senegal, Switzerland and Thailand.

- **Conduct impact assessments on the effect of the Millennium Development Goals to date on those most affected by extreme poverty, which put the participation of people experiencing poverty at its core:** Such impact assessments would enable the United Nations system to gauge the measures that have been effective to date in improving the lives of people experiencing the most severe poverty. A participatory approach to the assessments will capitalize on the expertise of people living in extreme poverty in order to better understand the obstacles to achieving the goals, as well the measures required in order to fill the implementation gaps which currently exist. Such assessments will also provide a wealth of evidence to address how to reach the very poorest populations in the context of the 2015 Goals, and beyond. ATD Fourth World plans to undertake such an assessment, beginning in 2011, and to make available to all relevant actors at the United Nations its findings in time for the special event during the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly in 2013.